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The Marriage of Science and Religion

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The Marriage of Science and Religion

At the end of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, written by Walter M. Miller, Jr., the dropping of Lucifer and the resulting repetition of past destruction displays that there is an inherent flaw in the book's futuristic society. The technological and scientific revival of a world that once repudiated knowledge is remarkable. However, the divergence of science and religion has caused humanity to use the power that comes with knowledge as irresponsibly as it did in the Flame Deluge. Mendelsohn states that, in speculative fiction, "religion is repeatedly depicted as dangerous, diverging humans from the path of reason and true enlightenment" (269). While *A Canticle for Leibowitz* accepts the fact that there is a rift between religion and reason, the story does not portray only religion as a threat; Miller also illustrates the necessity for science to adopt the moral structures provided by religion in order to direct enlightenment towards the benefit of mankind. The story depicts the imperfections of both religion and science and highlights that humanity is in jeopardy if the two units do not work together.

A Canticle for Leibowitz presents the conflicts between religion and reason through certain characters that represent their respective fields. Brother Armbruster, the librarian at the monastery, argues against the implementation of Brother Kornhoer's lamp mechanism in the library, since its placement and the resulting movement of the crucifix has a negative religious connotation (Miller 149). He criticizes the technological achievement, indignantly proclaiming, "You'd make Our Lord move over to make room for progress!" (Miller 149). Armbruster's

behavior matches religion's role in the widespread SF story of diverting humans from scientific advancement. At the same time, however, Thon Taddeo, the core representative of reason in the novel, depicts that science's disdain for religion has analogous negative consequences. He searches for truth without a spiritual purpose, captivated only by technological grandeurs like Brother Kornhoer's artificial light. While the monks may not understand the theoretical principles contained in the texts they preserve, their purpose to safeguard knowledge until it can be used to benefit society in the name of Saint Leibowitz is definitely respectable. Taddeo, however, proclaims that "[their] present facilities are inadequate, not to mention 'inaccessible' to the rest of the world," since he believes they are not capable of spreading the information they store to the general population (Miller 221). He sees the monks, in some sense correctly, as mere copiers of information they are too ignorant to comprehend, but he doesn't appreciate their significant efforts to tailor ancient scholarly information that would have been lost forever to improve the erudition of future generations. The characters of Armbruster and Taddeo show that the divergence between religion and science results from both a disregard for reason in the name of God and a thirst for knowledge without an awareness of its purpose.

In addition to presenting the fundamental differences between science and religion, Miller shows that humanity cannot learn from the past without a combination of the two. For example, religion in the story often distorts history, preventing the understanding of empirical truths that may be necessary for human progress. For example, when Brother Reader dictates the written record of the Flame Deluge, there are elements involving Satan and God that the reader knows are distortions of what really occurred (183). Taddeo brings forth a crucial nuance of science when he asserts that, although he doesn't reject the history monks believe, it cannot be accepted without question (127). Therefore, Mendelsohn's assertion is correct in that religion

without science can divert people from reason, as only science brings the inquisitive nature necessary for the extrapolation of truth. However, science without religion is equally inefficient, because while science is concerned with how events occur, only religion provides moral structures that explain why they occur. Although Taddeo may have a more realistic understanding of the Flame Deluge, he doesn't comprehend the misuse of science that caused it. When he asks Marcus Apollo how a civilization could possibly destroy itself, Apollo replies, "by being materially great and materially wise, and nothing else" (Miller 127). Apollo, unlike Taddeo, understands the consequences that were brought by using the knowledge provided by science irresponsibly. Therefore, it is true that religion in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* colors history with the touch of the divine, but Miller also suggests that science needs the morals religion provides in order to truly understand the past.

Rather than focusing on religion's perilous effects in the general SF story, Miller instead demonstrates that the quest for enlightenment without religion presents the real danger. An innate imperfection of science is that it results in power and corruption. Dom Paulo speaks of such corruption when he pleads with Thon Taddeo to do something about Hannegan's selfish political ambitions: "...you promise to begin restoring Man's control over Nature. But who will govern the use of the power to control natural forces? Who will use it? To what end?" (134). He hints that knowledge brings power, and that power must be used sensibly. Taddeo, however, regards the military goals of his monarch "as impersonal phenomena beyond his control like a flood, famine, or whirlwind" (Miller 211). He fails to comprehend the responsibility religion commands, believing that the transfer from ignorance to Truth is bound to incorporate violence, so he therefore doesn't appreciate that the monks' painstaking preservation of knowledge over time strives to facilitate its spread in a conscientious and peaceful manner. The reader fully

realizes the consequences of searching for reason in the absence of religion when humanity's self-destruction shockingly repeats itself at the end of the novel. Domne Zerchi is certain that the current people in power will not exploit their nuclear weapons at the expense of innocents because they should understand what happened in the past: "*now*, the princes, the presidents, the praesidiums, now they know...they cannot do it again...only a race of madmen could do it again" (Miller 275). Unfortunately, he is proven to be incorrect, which is evidence that that if people had listened to the rules religion dictates for science's use, unnecessary bloodshed could have been prevented.

A Canticle for Leibowitz shows that religion and science both have defects that can endanger human progress if they do not accept each other's elementary principles. Mendelsohn explains that in the widespread SF story, "religion is not only dangerous and misleading, but...sentient beings are generally too weak-willed to reject it" (269). Miller's story does portray that there are those who value religion excessively over reason, but he emphasizes that the real problem lies in rejecting it entirely in the name of science. The separation of the two entities causes disaster, especially since science cannot learn from religion. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* shares the fundamental gap between science and religion that is present in the widespread SF story, but it teaches that only a marriage of the two can solve humanity's problems.

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